

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

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Improving Teacher Quality Grants
Coordinating Board for Higher Education
October 14, 2004

DESCRIPTION

Each year the MDHE receives funds from the federal government to administer a competitive grants program for K-12/higher education partnerships dedicated to professional development for teachers in core academic subjects. When appropriate, administrators, paraprofessionals, and pre-service teachers are eligible to participate in these professional development activities. Last year funds were used to support professional development in science only for high-need middle and high schools. Cycle-3 funds will be more narrowly focused on grades 4-8 only and but will expand the content focus by including both science and mathematics. The intent of this board item is to provide information about the Cycle-3 *Improving Teacher Quality Grant* program and the appointment of an external evaluator.

Background

The MDHE *Improving Teacher Quality Grant* is funded under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Title II Part A of Public Law 107-110). The MDHE receives approximately \$1.2 million dollars annually from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) to distribute to K-12/higher education partnerships. Funds are used to support teacher professional development activities for core academic subjects. Eligible partnerships must at least include the following three partners:

- Division of higher education that prepares teachers
- A higher education school, college, or department of arts and sciences
- High-need K-12 school district

Additional partnerships may also include other schools that may not be in high-need districts, private schools, charter public schools, non-profit organizations, the business community, and other organizations that help to advance the projects' goals. Working within guidelines required by the federal government, the department uses these funds to:

- Improve K-12 student academic achievement
- Increase school district and building accountability for improved academic achievement
- Increase teacher, principal, and paraprofessional quality
- Implement positive changes in higher education curriculum and requirements

Awards for Cycle-1 and Cycle-2 were made in February 2003 and 2004 respectively. Cycle-1 projects have been completed, and the final evaluation is underway. Cycle-2 projects are in process.

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Each year, consideration is given to refinements for the RFP with a goal of improving the overall quality and impact of projects supported by these federal funds. MDHE staff is working closely with personnel from K-12, higher education, and the U.S. Department of Education to design the Cycle-3 RFP.

Several factors were considered in identifying content areas and grade levels for Cycle-3 projects. Industries targeted for economic growth, including advanced manufacturing, information technology and the life sciences, require a workforce that has proficient knowledge of mathematics and science. In addition, an increased number of entry-level jobs regardless of occupational classification require stronger foundations in these two academic disciplines. Consequently, the Cycle-3 RFP will continue to include science but has also been expanded to include mathematics. The grade levels targeted, however, will be restricted to grades four through eight, to focus on those years when Missouri students experience the most significant drop in both mathematics and science MAP scores. The sequential nature of mathematics and science concepts suggests that early intervention in grades four through eight should have positive consequences in secondary and postsecondary levels. In addition, the professional development projects funded will be expected to align with assessment and curriculum reforms initiated by DESE's grade-level expectations.

Project design features have also been revised with an intent to increase the involvement of K-12 school-district and building personnel in designing projects, to require that the needs of particular school buildings are primary drivers for proposed projects, and to ensure better alignment between project content and methods with district/building curriculum and classroom materials. The number and size of the awards will be flexible, dependent upon the quality of the proposal, the number of students served, the specific requirements of the proposed activities, and the cost-effectiveness of the proposed project. The Cycle-3 RFP will also provide an opportunity for larger and multi-year proposals, involving collaborations among multiple partners and/or spanning wide geographic areas.

Personnel at DESE have indicated their support for the proposed changes for Cycle-3. By distributing separate grant funds through Title II Part A to DESE and to higher education, the U.S. Department of Education promotes cross-communication across agencies and ensures that both agencies have authority for some funds to be used in support of teacher quality improvement. Unique features of the MDHE grant program include:

- Competitive funds requiring involvement of high-poverty school districts, colleges of education and departments of arts and sciences.
- Level of collaboration required of all eligible partners
- Good faith efforts to involve private schools
- Distribution of funds throughout the state rather than to one or two geographic areas
- Demonstration of impact on pre-service training programs
- Link of project content to particular materials used by school districts

The science and mathematics focus for Cycle-3 is designed to expand the number schools and teachers in grades four through eight that are impacted by funded projects, and to ensure school district

involvement in the design of projects. The RFP has been designed so that these goals can be achieved by enhancing projects currently receiving some funding through other sources and/or by the establishment of new projects.

Project Evaluation

As part of each cycle, an external evaluator is identified and supported by funds allocated to each grantee to systematically review the individual and collective impact of all funded proposals. Competition for the external evaluator award is administered by the Office of Administration. Dr. Sandra Abell, Professor of Science and Education and Director of the Southwestern Bell Science Education Center, was awarded the external evaluator contracts for both Cycle-1 and Cycle-2, and based on her successful performance and availability of funds, her contract as external evaluator was renewed for Cycle 3 to cover the period January 1, 2005 through November 30, 2006. Dr. Abell and her team of external evaluators have been involved in helping to design changes associated with evaluation requirements that will be included in the Cycle-3 RFP. Selection of an external evaluator for Cycle-4 will require a new competition administered by the Office of Administration.

Conclusions

The *Improving Teacher Quality Grant* program administered by the MDHE supports quality professional development of K-12 teachers. Cycle-3 revisions are targeted at improving the level of collaboration between K-12 and higher education in the design, implementation, and evaluation of funded projects. Appointment of an external evaluator prior to the release of the RFP for Cycle-3 is helping to ensure that the necessary elements for effective program evaluation are built into the design of the RFP. Providing opportunities for multi-year funding should increase continuity, depth, scope, and magnitude for achieving particular results.

STATUTORY REFERENCE

Section 173.050(2), RSMo, Statutory requirements regarding the CBHE's authority to receive expend federal funds for educational programs

Public Law 107-110, Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act: The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

RECOMMENDED ACTION

This is an information item only.

ATTACHMENT (S)

None